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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the impact of the Parent Linking Project III (PLP III) on its participants. The PLP III is a comprehensive program for teenage mothers which offers workshops in parenting, mother-child interaction, and vocational awareness, and provides day care services that allow teen mothers to take the opportunity to complete their high school education. The subjects of the study were 23 black teenage mothers aged 15-18 years, and their children aged 5-48 months. The Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory, the Nursing Child Assessment Teaching Scale, and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory were administered before and after participation in the project to determine the project's impact on participants' parenting attitudes, mother-child interaction skills, and self-esteem. It was found that the mean response scores increased favorably for inappropriate expectations of the child, lack of empathy for the child, corporal punishment, and role reversal. The results indicate a need for early and comprehensive intervention programs for teenage mothers and their children. The study concludes with list of 21 references. (RJC)

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FINDINGS FROM AN EVALUATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL-AGE PARENTS

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Findings from an Evaluation of a Comprehensive Parent Education Program for School-Age Parents

Abstract-The Parent Linking Project III is a comprehensive program for teenage mothers which offers workshops in parenting, mother-child interaction and vocational awareness, and provides day care services to the teen mother to allow her the opportunity to complete her high school education. The parenting attitudes, mother-child interaction skills and self-esteem of the program participants were studied on a pre-test, post-test basis to determine whether the program had had an impact in any of these areas. It was found that the the participants increased their group mean scores in both parenting and mother-child interaction over the program year. Results indicate a need for early and comprehensive intervention programs for teenage mothers and their children.

Each year over one million teenagers in the United States become pregnant and over one-half million of them give birth (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1981). The literature has correlated teenage pregnancy with adverse, pervasive and enduring social, economic and educational consequences for adolescent parents and their offspring (Baldwin & Cain, 1980; Elster, McAnarney, & Lamb, 1983; Johnson, Loxterkamp, & Albanese, 1982; Osofsky & Osofsky, 1970; Simkins, 1984).

In recent years, a number of studies have reported that teenage childrearing contributes to interaction disturbances and developmental delays of the offspring (Baldwin & Cain, 1980; Field, Widmayer, Stringer & Ignatoff, 1980; Monkus & Bancalari, 1981). These studies report that the young parents' age, lack of knowledge in the area of

child development and unrealistic expectations, as well as the occurrence of stressful events that frequently accompany teenage pregnancy and parenthood, negatively affect the environment in which teenagers bring up their children.

Research has indicated that children born to adolescent parents are at a modestly increased risk for maltreatment as compared to children born later in the mother's life (Bolton, Laner & Kane, 1980). It has been found that the children of teenage mothers are more likely to be physically neglected rather than any other form of abuse (Miller, 1984). Miller (1984) reports that physical neglect, which is correlated with less formal education, unemployment, and lower income for the teenage mother, can be ameliorated only through the provision of material support to promote adequate basic care of the mother and child as well as educational and social support to encourage a higher quality of mother-child interaction.

Society's increasing awareness of the consequences of teenage pregnancy, childbearing and childrearing, has prompted the development of programs for pregnant and parenting teenagers. One such program is the Parent Linking Project (PLP), which was developed by the New Jersey Chapter of the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse in response to the trend of teenage parenthood and its relationship to child abuse and neglect. The goal of the project has been to enhance the competence of new parents in providing for the mental, emotional, and physical health and development of their children, thereby lessening the likelihood of maltreatment.

In 1984, the Parent Linking Project III (PLP III) was developed and implemented. Since child care is a major factor in the teen

mother's ability to complete high school, PLP III provides free child care to teen mothers who contracted to complete high school. In exchange for the free child care, the program participants were required to attend weekly workshops in parenting, mother-child interaction and vocational development.

In addition to these workshops, individual counseling, crisis intervention and information and referral was provided on an as needed basis. As a whole, these components sought to prevent present and future child abuse and neglect in the subject population by enhancing the teenager's ability to meet her economic and developmental needs, as well as the needs of her child.

The overall objective of this study was to evaluate the impact the Parent Linking Project III had on its participants. Specifically, it was hypothesized that the teenage mothers:

a. Would increase their knowledge of parenting skills and children's developmental milestones;

b. Would increase the quality of their mother-child interaction skills:

c. Would enhance their self-esteem.

The findings of this study may be useful in illustrating the need for comprehensive prevention and intervention programs for teenage mothers.

Method

Design

Several instruments were used in the evaluation to gather information pertaining to the subjects and to measure change in the participants' parenting attitudes and child rearing practices.

The mothers' knowledge of parenting skills and developmental milestones was determined by their score on the Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory (APPI). The instrument was designed to measure four constructs: 1) appropriate developmental expectations of children; 2) ability to be empathically aware of children's needs; 3) belief in the use of alternative non-abusive means of punishment; and 4) understanding of appropriate parent and child family roles (Bavolek, 1984). This instrument, which demonstrates validity and high internal reliability, is self-administered and has a sixth grade reading level.

The University of Washington's Nursing Child Assessment Teaching Scale (NCATS) was used to measure mother-child interaction. The parents' teaching style and clarity of cues, responsiveness of the parent and infant, and the existence of cognitive and social-emotional growth fostering behavior were rated on a 73 item binary scale.

The self-esteem of the subjects was measured by the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory (SEI). The inventory consists of 58 items which yield both a total score and individual scores for each area-General Self, Social Self-Peers, Home-Parents and School-Academic. Both the validity and reliability of the instrument have been established (Coopersmith, 1984). The instrument is self-administered and can be used with children between the ages of eight and fifteen.

A questionnaire was constructed in order to collect demographic, prenatal, obstetric, and neonatal data. In addition, a questionnaire was devised to allow program participants the opportunity to evaluate and rate the program. These questionnaires were filled out anonymously by the respondents.

Procedure

The PLP III teenagers were asked to complete the demographic questionnaire, the AAPI and the SEI at the beginning of the program year. The NCATS was administered individually at some point during the beginning of the program year. At the end of the program, the teenagers were asked to re-take the AAPI and SEI and fill out a program evaluation. At that time, the NCATS was also re-administered.

A comparison group of teenage mothers was administered only the AAPI while in a waiting room at a health clinic in the same city. Because of the difficulty in locating and following a comparison group over a period of time, this group was administered the AAPI only once.

Results & Discussion

Description of the Population

The subjects consisted of 23 teenage mothers and their children enrolled in the PLP III for the 1985-1986 program year. Participants were admitted into the program on a first come first serve basis. Due to funding restrictions, only 23 teenage mothers and one child per each mother could be served. The PLP III mothers were all black, single low income Newark residents. There were representatives from eight of the twelve public high schools in Newark in the program.

The teenage mothers ranged in age from 15 to 18, with 68% under age 16. Their children ranged in age from 5 months to 48 months with 50% of the children being 12 months of age or less. The teenage mothers were all enrolled in high school. At the time of testing, 36% of the mothers hadparticipated in the program the previous year.

A comparison group consisting of 19 teenage mothers was used in part of the analysis. The teenage mothers in the comparison group were also black, single, low income residents from the same community,

ranging in age from 14 to 20. Fifty- three percent of the comparison group reported being in high school, 11% were not in school and 36% did not respond. Two of the teenagers in the comparison group were high school graduates.

Attendance

Each client's workshop attendance was recorded, as well as the day care attendance of each child. It was found that there was an average overall workshop attendance record of 65.2%. Since attendance for programs serving school-age parents is generally low, this figure was considered normal. Note that other programs for school-age parents report an average attendance rate of 66% (Mitchell & Valentine, 1983). The average day care utilization rate was 68%. This rate was good considering the increased rate of illness associated with very young children. It is important to note that there was a marked increase in attendance for both infants and teenagers during those months in which van transportation was provided.

Within PLP III, 18% of the absences each month were attributed to illness of the infants and mandatory appointments at agencies such as WIC, AFDC, and Family Planning Services. In addition, the work schedules of several of the teenagers who were employed part-time sometimes interfered with their workshop attendance. It is important to mention that two of the program participants attended 97% of the workshops, with a total of seven or 30% attending 75% of the workshops.

Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI)

Scores were obtained for each of the four constructs on the AAPI parenting inventory. High scores indicate more appropriate parenting attitudes and beliefs. The mean pre-test scores for the PLP III

teenagers and the scores for the comparison group appear in Table 1. When the scores on the pre-test of the teenagers in the PLP III were compared with those of the comparison group, no significant differences between the two groups were found using the t-test on any of the four constructs.

Insert Table 1

Mean response scores obtained from the PLP III pre-test were compared with the PLP III post-test scores. The mean response scores increased favorably for each of the four constructs: Inappropriate Expectations increased by .22%; Lack of Empathy by 5.6%; Corporal Punishment by 6.77%; and Role Reversal by 12.25%. While an increase in mean scores was found for each of the four constructs, the result of a matched t-test found no significant differences for any of the four constructs.

When one looks at individual gains, it was found that 27% of the teens developed more appropriate expectations, 63% increased their level of empathy, 59% improved their understanding of alternate forms of discipline and 72% developed and understanding of appropriate parent and child roles.

As demonstrated by the PLP III teenagers pre-test scores on the Inappropriate Expectations scale of the AAPI, the teenagers were already aware of many of the how-to-do's of basic child care. What they lacked was an integration of the factual information with the emotional issues involved in parenting. Therefore, the program's workshops focused on helping the teens to develop a greater level of empathy by helping them understand what the emotional needs of their children are and how they could function better as a parent to meet

their children's needs. Since teenagers struggle with their own unmet needs during this phase of their life, it is difficult for them to always respond appropriately to their child's needs.

The results of the post-test were compared with the comparison group (the comparison group was only tested once due to difficulty in tracking this group over a period of nine months). The PLP III teenagers scored significantly higher ($p < .01$) in their ability to be empathetic and their understanding of alternative non-abusive means of discipline.

Insert Table 2

Table 2 illustrates that overall, the teenagers who participated in the Parent Linking Project III demonstrated more appropriate parenting attitudes, and above all, expressed a significantly higher ability to be empathically aware of children's needs and believed less in the value of corporal punishment than teenage mothers who did not participate in PLP III.

It was hypothesized that program participants with a high attendance rate will score higher on the AAPI post-test. High workshop attendance was positively and significantly correlated with an understanding of the importance of utilizing non-abusive forms of discipline ($r=.43$, $p<.05$) and knowledge of appropriate parent and child roles ($r=.39$, $p<.05$). High overall workshop attendance was positively and significantly correlated with knowledge of appropriate developmental milestones ($r=.38$, $p<.05$), and empathy towards children ($r=.39$, $p<.05$). Thus, it appears that those teens who attended the workshops more frequently learned from the program's curriculum and consequently scored higher on all of the four constructs.

Nursing Child Assessment Teaching Scale (NCATS)

Young mothers have been noted more often than older mothers to view infant stimulation and play activities between themselves and their children as likely to spoil their children. Simkins (1984) found that younger mothers are less verbal in their interactions with their infants and less responsive to their baby's needs. They also tend to be underinvolved with the infant. Fears of being thought "babyish" if caught playing with their babies have also been reported (Levenson, Atkinson, Hale & Hollier, 1978). This type of behavior was also observed during the PLP III mother-child interation workshops. Over the course of the program year the teenagers were observed gradually letting go of their need to act "cool" and grown-up in front of their peers. They began to view active play with their children as a normal parenting activity and grew less concerned about looking "stupid" in front of their peers.

The NCATS instrument was used to measure change in mother-child interaction over the program year. The scores on the NCATS can range from zero to seventy three, with high scores indicating more positive mother-child interaction. Ruth Klug, R.N., M.S. who is NCAST trained, was hired as a consultant to administer and interpret the test.

The pre-test scores ranged from 33 to 62 with a mean of 44.4 and a standard deviation of 7.87. A score of 54 or better signifies adequate mother-child interaction, therefore, the majority of the teenager's NCATS scores were found to be deficient.

The total obtained scores for the NCATS pre-test were correlated with the mother's age, her grade, the age in which she gave birth, the child's age and the number of months the mother has been involved in

the Parent Linking Project.

There was a significant correlation between mother's grade and her total NCATS pre-test score (Pearson $r = .40$, $p < .03$). Those mothers in the higher grades had more favorable test scores thus indicating that the level of education is related to the quality of mother-child interaction. This finding is consistent with Barnard's (1978) research on the NCATS, which found that the more years of schooling, the higher the average score.

The baby's age was also correlated with the NCATS pre-test scores (Pearson $r = -.57$, $p < .002$). Older children had mothers who scored higher, in line with Barnard (1978) who found that generally, the younger the child, the lower the average score on the scale, particularly for children under 12 months of age.

The number of months the mother has attended the program was also positively and significantly correlated with high test scores (Pearson $r=.58$, $p < .001$). Those mothers who attended the program for a longer period of time received more favorable test scores, an indication that the program may have had a positive effect on mother-child interactions.

The age of the mother and her test scores were negatively correlated and approached significance, meaning that the older the mother, the more favorable was her test score. However, age in which she gave birth was not correlated with her test score.

The post-test scores ranged from 36 to 56 with a mean of 48 and a standard deviation of 5.51. When these were compared to pre-test scores, it was found that seventy-one percent of the teenagers had improved their NCAST scores over the course of the program (pre- and post- testing took place approximately 6-7 months apart).

Table 3 illustrates the mean scores and percent increase or decrease for each subscale. A matched t-test, conducted between pre- and post- test scores, found no significant differences.

INSERT TABLE 3

The total scores obtained for the NCATS post-test were correlated with workshop attendance, mother's age, the age at which she gave birth, her grade in school and the baby's age. No significant correlations were found for the first four variables. It was found that those mothers with younger babies, i.e., less than one year, scored more favorably on the NCATS than those with older babies ($r = .58$, $p < .006$). This finding is contrary to what was found on the pre-test. We conjecture that the youngest children responded more favorably to the intervention because they received intervention at an earlier age than the older children in the program. Mothers with older children entered the program when their children were older and therefore did not have the benefit of early intervention. These findings further illustrate the crucial need for early intervention with teenage mothers and their children since those mothers who entered the program with younger children appear to have benefited more from the intervention and scored more favorably on the NCATS post-test.

Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI)

Since it has been found that teenage mothers exhibit lower self-esteem than nulliparous teenagers (Thompson, 1984), a measure of the PLP III's teenagers self-esteem was obtained. For the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, high scores correspond to high self-esteem.

The pre-test scores ranged from 44 to 98, with 100 being the maximum possible score. The mean was 73.9 and the standard deviation,

16.33. Since Coopersmith (1984) reports that means range from 70 to 80, this sample appears to have begun the program with moderate to high self-esteem.

Post-test scores ranged from 42 to 100 with a mean of 69.96 and a standard deviation of 16.09. The decrease was not found to be significant. Since the pre-test scores were found to be moderate to high, a significant increase was not expected. Other self-esteem studies have found that subjects entering a program with moderate to high self-esteem show little change since they are already describing themselves as positive (Stake, DeVille & Pennell, 1983).

When the scores on the SEI were correlated with each of the four constructs of the AAPI, it was found that those individuals with higher self-esteem scores believed more in the use of non-abusive means of discipline ($r=.39$, $p,.03$), and conversely, those with low self esteem were more likely to purport abusive attitudes. This finding is consistent with other studies that have associated low self-esteem with abusive attitudes (Sokol, 1976; Spinetta & Rigler, 1972). Those professionals involved with teenage mothers should be aware of this association and make an effort to identify those teenagers with low self-esteem and offer them more individualized counseling as a preventive measure.

Total self-esteem scores were correlated with the mother's age, grade, the age in which she gave birth and the baby's age. No significant correlations were found.

Vocational Awareness

In order to promote gainful employment and financial independence, the teenagers attended weekly vocational workshops. At these

workshops, guest speakers presented information on a variety of non-traditional careers for women as well as job training programs and college degree programs. These workshops also addressed job search techniques and life skills such as budgeting and decision making.

Eight seniors were enrolled in the PLP III and all of them received their high school diploma. Over half of these graduates were planning to enroll in college or vocational programs or are already in a college or vocational program. The remaining graduates are either employed or are seeking employment.

Pregnancy Recidivism Rate

Several studies have reported the incidence of second pregnancies to teenage mothers. For example, at least one half of teenage mothers experience a second pregnancy within 36 months of delivery (Furstenberg, 1976). Therefore, one of the goals of the PLP III was to prevent repeat pregnancies.

During the program year, 3 or 13% of the teens experienced a repeat pregnancy that resulted in a live birth. Similar programs for teenage mothers report a pregnancy recidivism rate of 15% (Polnit, Kahn & Stevens, 1985). Polnit (1985) et al. found that when a teenage mother is not involved in a support program, 25% gave birth to a second child within one year of the birth of her first child and 52% gave birth to a second child within two years after the birth of her first child. Therefore, it is important that programs for parenting teens focus on sexuality, birth control and other pregnancy prevention efforts.

Participants Evaluation of the Program

The teenage mothers of PLP III were asked to evaluate the program and state what they felt the program helped them with and what they gained from their participation. These forms were completed

anonymously in order to allow the respondent the opportunity to rate the program as honestly as possible.

The results of the teenager's evaluation of the overall program were quite positive. In general, they were pleased with the services of the project and found the program to be beneficial. Through their involvement PLP III, the participants reported that they were better able toremain in school and learn about themselves and their children.

In order to conduct a responsible program evaluation, the authors made every attempt to collect data that was as valid as possible. In trying to obtain reliable and valid measures, we selected instruments that were easily administered. Unfortunately, we frequently experienced a reluctance on the part of our program participants to cooperate with our data collection. Therefore, it was encouraging to find that the results of this evaluation were positive, in spite of the subjects' resistance.

Conclusions

The results of the present research project indicate a need for early and comprehensive intervention programs for teenage mothers and their children. It is of paramount importance that programs working with teenage mothers espouse a basic philosophy of providing nurturance and positive emotional support to their participants. Everything done within the program must reflect this basic philosophy. This atmosphere not only serves to parent the teenage parent, but also serves as a positive role model for them to utilize in their parenting role.

The Parent Linking Project-III workshop components utilized this

concept and sought to convey it to the teenagers in a variety of ways (i.e., skits, discussions, role playing, therapeutic exercises, etc.) This attempt to incorporate attitudes and behaviors is an ongoing process that takes much time, practice and consistency, which program operations must be able to support.

The authors found that the provision of extensive outreach and comprehensive case management services were vital to gaining the teenagers' trust and cooperation. It is our belief that programs serving teenage parents must seek to address all of their existing needs in order to truly bring about positive changes.

Since having a child as a teenager presents additional challenges to the mother's role and to the developing child, both emotional and practical support is crucial. Teenage parents and their children are a vulnerable population at overwhelming odds of becoming involved in some type of social service intervention. Therefore, it is in everyone's best interest to provide preventive services to this population.

A significant amount of human suffering and future tax dollars can be saved by providing cost effective prevention programs to all teenage parents. Since it has been found that the Parent Linking Project-III seems to have had a positive impact on the teenage mothers parenting and mother-child interaction skills, it is suggested that existing and future programs for parenting teenagers could be modeled after this program.

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Table 1

A comparison of the Parent Linking Project-III's Group Mean AAPI Pre-Test Scores and the Comparison Groups Mean Scores.

Constructs	Parent Linking Project-III AAPI Pre-Test	Comparison Group
Inappropriate Expectations		
M	24.13	22.44
SD	3.62	3.03
Lack of Empathy		
M	27.48	25.05
SD	5.09	4.21
Corporal Punishment		
M	34.44	32.66
SD	4.55	4.47
Role Reversal		
M	23.04	23.21
SD	5.69	3.40

Note: The maximum score possible for Inappropriate Expectations = 30, Lack of Empathy = 40, Corporal Punishment = 50 and Role Reversal = 40.

Table 2

A Comparison of PLP-III Group Mean Post-Test Scores and the Comparison Groups Scores for the AAPI.

CONSTRUCTS	COMPARISON GROUP	PLP-III POST
Inappropriate Expectations		
M	22.44	24.18
SD	3.03	3.44
Lack of Empathy		
M	25.05	29.05 **
SD	4.21	3.78
Corporal Punishment		
M	32.66	36.77 **
SD	4.47	4.75
Role Reversal		
M	23.21	25.86
SD	3.40	6.43

** $p < .01$

Table 3

NCATS Pre and Post Group Mean Scores and the Percent Increase or Decrease.

	PRE	POST	% INCREASE OR DECREASE
Parental Behavior			
Sensitivity to Cues			
M	6.15	7.22	17.43%
SD	2.2	1.39	
Response to Distress			
M	7.35	8.39	14.13%
SD	2.88	3.05	
Social Emotional Growth Fostering			
M	7.60	8.22	8.18%
SD	1.47	1.67	
Cognitive Growth Fostering			
M	7.60	8.67	14.03%
SD	2.08	1.97	
Child's Behavior			
Clarity of Child's Cues			
M	8.55	8.33	-2.6%
SD	1.47	1.74	
Responsiveness to Parent			
M	7.15	7.22	1%
SD	3.27	2.84	
TOTAL SCORE	44.40	48.00	8.1%
	7.87	5.5	